

Introduction to Social and Political Philosophy (01:730:255:01)

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Office hours: Tuesday 12pm-1pm (or by appointment)

Course Outline

This course will mostly be structured around readings related to some core concepts in social and political philosophy: justice, rights, equality, freedom, and democracy. Along the way, we will also examine some more applied issues in contemporary social and political philosophy, including whether we have a duty to give to charity, voter ignorance, proposed alternatives to democracy, gun rights, and immigration.

I want us to come away with a better understanding of the complexities involved in discussing these concepts and how they apply to the sort of contemporary political issues that we grapple with in our daily lives. Virtually any contested political issue one can think of will, at some point, turn on questions related to justice, rights, equality, freedom, and the like. Far from sterile, purely academic discussions about abstract concepts, then, we will be engaging in discussions about deeply important concepts that pervade and structure our societies. We will be in a better position to know what exactly is involved in disputes about whether some body of laws are just, what it means to claim one has certain rights, what equality is and whether it is desirable, different (often incompatible) conceptions of freedom, democracy and some of its competitors, and more.

Course Requirements

Attendance and participation – 10%

Reflection Pieces – 30%

Papers – 60%

Attendance and Participation

I expect students to come to class with papers read in advance, ready to discuss the relevant issues. Believe me when I say that the class will be far more engaging when you actively participate – raise objections, express confusion, discuss your ideas and arguments, bring up current examples that may help make the relevant issues concrete, and more. Throughout the term, I will be taking note of who contributes, ultimately factoring such contribution into the overall grade.

Reflection Pieces

Over the course of the term, you will write *four* short reflection pieces on the papers you have read. These pieces will be 1-2 (typed) pages and must engage critically with some argument or theme present in one of the assigned readings. You can criticize the authors, defend them from criticisms discussed in class, etc. You must *not* simply describe or summarize their position.

These pieces can be on any of the *assigned readings*: you could spread them out over the course of the term, write on the first four readings, write on the last four, and so on. I only ask that they are not all sent at the one time; one reflection piece per reading.

Each piece will be worth 7.5% of the total grade. You should send them to my email as either a doc. or a pdf. (And be sure to mention what you're sending in the subject heading of the email!)

Papers

Two papers will be due over the course of the term. The first paper, worth 25% of the overall grade, is due *November 4th*. This paper should be between 2000-2500 words.

The second paper, worth 35% of the overall grade, is due *December 15th*. This paper should be between 2500-3500 words.

Grade Breakdown

A: 90-100

B+: 85-89

B: 80-84

C+: 75-79

C: 70-74

D: 60-69

F: 0-59

Course Schedule

(Note: no textbook is required for this course. All readings will be made available through Sakai.)

Sep 4th: Introduction

Sep 9th: The Basics of Argument and Reasoning

Sep 11th: Core Concepts in Moral, Social, and Political Philosophy

Rights:

Sep 16th: Wenar, 'Rights' SEP (Sections 1-2.1.6)

Sep 18th: Wenar, 'Rights', SEP (Sections 2.2, 6.1-6.2)

Justice:

Sep 23rd: Driver, 'Utilitarianism'

Sep 25th: Rawls, 'A Theory of Justice' (Sections 1-6, 11)

Sep 30th: Nozick, 'The Entitlement Theory of Justice'

Oct 2nd: Cohen, 'Why Not Socialism?' (Sections 1-3)

Oct 7th: Boxill, 'A Lockean Case for Black Reparations'

Equality:

Oct 9th: Temkin, 'Inequality: A Complex, Individualistic, and Comparative Notion'

Oct 14th: Narveson, 'Egalitarianism: Partial, Counterproductive, and Baseless'

Oct 21st: Phillips, 'Defending Equality of Outcome'

Freedom:

Oct 23rd: Mill, 'On Liberty'

Oct 28th: Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty'

Oct 30th: Pettit, 'Republican Political Theory'

Democracy

Nov 4th: Bird, 'Democratic Rule'

Nov 6th: Valentini, 'Justice and Democracy'

Nov 11th: Somin, 'Knowledge About Ignorance'

Nov 13th: Brennan, 'The Right to a Competent Electorate'

Nov 18th: Guerrero, 'Against Elections'

Wealth and Morality:

Nov 20th: Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality'

Nov 25th: Wolf, 'Moral Saints'

Gun Rights

Dec 2nd: Huemer, 'Is There a Right to Own a Gun?'

Dec 4th: Dixon, 'On Philosophers and Handguns'

Immigration:

Dec 9th: Huemer, 'Is There a Right to Immigrate?'

Dec 11th: Joshi, 'For (Some) Immigration Restrictions'

Plagiarism Guidelines

Please be sure to adhere to Rutgers policy on plagiarism and academic integrity. This website should contain the information you need: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

Accessibility

As students at Rutgers, you are each entitled to equal access to educational opportunities at this university. (Or to put things in a way we will later come to understand, you each have a *claim-right* against the university that you are afforded such equal access.) Feel free to speak to me about any issues you may have, and please avail yourself of the services provided by the ODS (Office of Disability Services). Here is a link to their website: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Student Wellness

Here are some links that may prove useful during your time here at Rutgers:

Rutgers Student Wellness Program

<https://ubhc.rutgers.edu/swp/index.html>

CAPS

<http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance

<http://vpva.rutgers.edu/>